

SAN DIEGO MTS TROLLEY: IMPROVING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

INTRODUCTION

The 2009/2010 San Diego County Grand Jury received a citizens' complaint alleging that the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) Trolley is not user friendly for visually impaired persons. The Grand Jury investigation and observations confirmed that substantial improvements to the announcement systems in the trolley cars and at the trolley stations would significantly assist the visually impaired users of the system. Population forecasts predict that twenty percent of the United States population will be 65 years of age by the year 2030, indicating a potential need for accessible, affordable, reliable, safe and barrier-free transportation.

INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with visually impaired persons who use the trolleys. Interviews were conducted with staff of the MTS and Trolley management. Grand Jury members took numerous trolley rides, visited various route station site locations, and toured the main trolley maintenance facility. During their rides on the trolley, the Grand Jury members spoke with tourists and other local riders of the system. Observations were made of visual instructions for riders and most importantly the audible interior and exterior messages for clarity and regularity. The investigation of the randomly selected trolley station sites and actual rides on the system reveal that when a rider is on the trolley, there is difficulty for the visually impaired and others unfamiliar with the system, to determine what to do because the announcements are not consistent. In addition, it is difficult and confusing for the visually impaired due to lack of large enough print on trolley schedules. No judgment is made that the MTS disregards the visually impaired or other disabled persons.

FACTS AND FINDINGS

Fact: The trolley ridership on an average weekday ranges from 100,000 to 110,000 passengers.

Fact: On special event days, such as sports and concerts, ridership ranges from 150,000 to 225,000 passengers.

Fact: Some characteristics of The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System are:

- The coverage of more than 570 square miles of urban area and 3,240 square miles of rural territory.
- The operation of more than 90 fixed bus routes, 125 paratransit vehicle and about 52 miles of light rail trolley tracks.

- That MTS was the recipient of the 2008 Outstanding Public Transportation System award from the American Public Transportation Association in the category of systems that provide more than thirty million annual passenger trips.

Fact: Trolley service for Orange, Green and Blue Lines runs 7.5 to 30 minutes apart depending on the day of the week, the time of day, and the line of trolley service.

Fact: The trolley is a means for visually impaired and other disabled persons to travel within San Diego County.

Fact: Visually impaired riders have to rely on audible interior and exterior trolley car announcements to determine which line they are using.

Fact: MTS Trolley System Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) number 107.04, dated 06/20/2007, states that the following mandatory announcements are to be made by trolley operators:

REGULAR EXTERIOR ANNOUNCEMENTS:

<u>Announcement Type:</u>	<u>When to Make Announcements:</u>
Normal Terminal Departure.....	Thirty seconds prior to departure
Immediate Terminal Departure.....	When entering a terminal late, and train is scheduled to depart

REGULAR INTERIOR ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Station Stop.....	In advance of each station
Terminal Station Stop.....	In advance of terminal station
Courtesy Notice.....	Leaving terminals and mid-route

Note: SOP requires that whenever possible, the automated announcement system should be used to make the above interior announcements.

Fact: Some trolley station structures are elevated and require stairs, elevators, or escalators for access.

Fact: MTS trolley cars vary in design of the entry and exit doors and platforms.

Fact: Maps of the trolley routes are posted at all station locations.

Fact: Printed versions of trolley maps and schedules are available at several MTS locations or via on line computer access.

Fact: Large print pamphlet style schedules and maps are not easily available or provided in large print.

Fact: The Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) is responsible for ensuring that all current and future transportation systems be fully accessible within American Disability Act (ADA) rules.

Finding 01: The MTS Trolley system policies and procedures comply with ADA requirements. However, improvements are needed in or carrying out those policies and procedures that impact the visually impaired.

Finding 02: Trolley operators do not consistently follow the mandatory announcement policies and procedures.

Finding 03: Trolley operator evaluations and audits by supervision are announced in advance allowing the operators knowledge of the date of their audit review.

Finding 04: MTS is in the process of standardizing platform entry levels for trolley cars to help facilitate accessibility into cars for persons with disabilities, as described in the ADA.

Finding 05: The FTA also provides ADA grant funds for programs to improve accessibility of transportation systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2009/2010 San Diego County Grand Jury recommends that the Chief Executive Officer of the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System direct the Chief Operations Officer of the Trolley system to:

10-06: Enforce current policies and procedures, mandating audible announcements.

10-07: Immediately rectify any mechanical deficiency that prevents or reduces the clarity of audible announcements in every trolley car.

10-08: Consult with the visually impaired and organizations that serve them, on the best way to design, produce, and provide large print schedules.

10-09: Implement unannounced, random supervisor inspections in the audit process of trolley operator performance to ensure compliance with existing policies and procedures.

10-10: Pursue federal transit grant funds for a more effective, verbal and automated audible announcement systems.

REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such

comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<u>Responding Agency</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Date</u>
Chief Executive Officer, San Diego Metropolitan Transit System	10-06 through 10-10	8/2/10